

PRESS CONFERENCE WITH MINORITY WHIP,  
STENY H. HOYER

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TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2011

11:33 A.M.

Mr. Hoyer. Okay. We meet at 12:00 today. As you know, this is a Monday-through-Thursday week. We expect to provide -- we have today an extension of the highway and the FAA. As you know, that was included in a unanimous consent that was reached last night. How we are going to consider this, one of two ways, on suspension or under a unanimous consent agreement. I am not sure which way the Republicans are proceeding; although, I have some reason to believe they may be going on suspension rather than pursuant to unanimous consent. Not a big deal in one sense, and my hope is that they will pass.

My staff has informed me that neither the highway nor the FAA have any underlying additions to them which would be inconsistent with simply straight extensions. Stop me if I am wrong, but the FAA is until the end of the year, and the highway bill is until March 31; is that accurate?

Q The end of January for one.

Mr. Hoyer. January 31 and March, not December 31? January 31 and March 31. FAA is January 31; highway -- is that correct?

Q Yes.

Mr. Hoyer. Okay. Then the charter school bill. As you know, we did most of the debate, all the consideration, last week. It will be considered and finished. There are two amendments pending, and there will be an MTR and then passage. Last votes about 2:00 or 3:00. Pretty early day today.

On Wednesday, we will consider one suspension, and then we expect to consider the resolution of disapproval. I think most of you know

that the resolution of disapproval received 52 negative votes in the Senate. So it has already been defeated in the Senate, so to some degree the House vote is moot because it will have no impact, even if we pass it, because obviously under the legislation, the Budget Control Act -- or Deficit Reduction Act, either House could defeat it. I am going to vote against the motion of disapproval myself, and I think that majority of our party will do so as well.

I think there is only one Democrat that voted. There were six Democrats absent from the Senate vote, which would have meant it was 59 if they had all been there and all voting. One Democrat voted "no."

And then on Thursday, we will have the -- it is referred to as the Protecting Jobs from Government Interference Act. Essentially it is the NLRB bill which deals with Boeing's placement of a factory in South Carolina and the finding by NLRB that it was a retaliatory action.

The President offered on Thursday night the American Jobs Act. It was, I think, in many ways a reflection of what we have been talking in the Make it in America piece of legislation: infrastructure investment, workforce development, small business tax credits, providing certainty for businesses and the encouragement for growth, putting money in people's pockets, and putting money in business pockets so that they can grow, expand, and hire people, and give them some credit for hiring people, particularly those who have been unemployed for some period of time.

The administration, looking at small business, in addition, very substantial infrastructure investment. I think that is very

important. Our party has been talking about infrastructure investment. If we are going to grow our economy, it will be because we maintain our infrastructure: roads, bridges, sewer systems, grids, things of that nature. And obviously that creates American jobs immediately.

In addition, we want to make sure that those who are in real pain and real stress and have been really disadvantaged are given help: unemployment insurance, reform and extension of the job tax credit for the long-term unemployed, and the Pathways Back to Work Fund, all of which add up to \$62 billion. And then putting more money in the hands of consumers and families by continuing the FICA tax reduction and increasing it slightly and including it as well for employers.

There are some very positive comments on that. Speaker Boehner and Leader Cantor: We are not opposed to initiatives to repair and improve infrastructure. We think that is a positive sign. Senators Lindsey Graham and Kay Bailey Hutchison are cosponsors, along with Senator Kerry, of an infrastructure bank which the President referred to. Mitch McConnell, the Senate Republican leader, in talking about infrastructure and -- excuse me, in talking about the payroll tax relief, said it would put a lot of money back in the hands of businesses and the hands of individuals. Republicans, generally speaking, from Maine to Mississippi like tax relief.

Again, the President made it clear in his State of the Union -- state of the jobs -- it wasn't a State -- his discussion about jobs -- in any event, made it clear that much of what he suggested had,

in fact, been supported in a bipartisan way over the years, and he is hopeful that that will receive a bipartisan response.

In referring to veterans, there is a bill in by Jeff Miller, Republican, who is the Veterans' Affairs Committee chairman, which has a Tax Credit to Hire Veterans Act of 2011. So, again, when you are talking about infrastructure, talking about payroll tax deductions, talking about veterans, you have had bipartisan support for these propositions in the past.

The inclination of some is to allege that if the President doesn't get what he has asked for, that the President will lose. My response to that is what the President has proposed is not for the President, it is for the American people, the American economy, and for people who are experiencing deep pain financially and psychologically as they are unable to support themselves and their families and to get a job, some of whom have been out of a job for a very long time. The thought that the President will lose is inaccurate. People who will lose are all of America; certainly the unemployed, certainly people who don't get jobs, but all of America as the economy struggles will be losers in that proposition, not the President. So I am hopeful that we come together not on behalf of President Obama, not on behalf of the Democratic or Republican agenda, but on behalf of the American people.

Secondly and lastly for my purposes, let me say that I endorse, support, and join in the suggestion of some 60 or so people, including the chairman and vice chairman of each of the major commissions, the Bowles-Simpson Commission and the Dominici-Rivlin

Commission -- Senator Dominici was not on the initial letter that you may have seen, but he is, in fact -- very simply because he did not respond in time to get on the letter -- he is, in fact, a sponsor of that letter, as are so many people: Republicans, Democrats, conservatives, liberals, moderates.

I feel very strongly -- Mark Zandi, of course, who we all use because he was McCain's guy -- it is believed that he is, at worst, a neutral voice on these issues. We believe that he is correct that if we adopt the President's program, we will increase employment, we will decrease unemployment, and we will grow the economy and the GDP and continue what both Commissions suggested should be the case; that is, in the short term, don't do anything to tap down the economy -- in fact, do things to stimulate the economy -- but in the long term get us back to a fiscally balanced posture that we were in in 2000.

I might say that I believe that the signatories are correct. Our target ought to be in the \$4 trillion-plus category, not \$1.5 trillion. That would require courage. It will require a sense of a longer view than simply the next 14 months. It will require a sense of responsibility beyond simply this Congress. And so I am hopeful that the members of the committee take very seriously the suggestions of the signatories of that particular letter.

I think it is critical that the Committee succeed. I think failure ought not to be an option, and I think failure of this Committee to come to a consensus would heighten the view of the American public that their government is not working and would lead to a further erosion

of confidence not only in government, but in the economy itself.

Obviously, confidence is a very big component of building back this economy, and I think we can -- I think one of the best things we can do to grow this economy is to reinstate confidence not just in the American people, but in the international community as well. I think that was shaken by our budget deficit disagreement and the precipice-approaching actions, which we overcame, but too late not to have adversely affected the confidence domestic and internationally.

So I am very hopeful and will be working towards the committee's success and the accomplishment of a grand bargain, big deal, call it what you will, the larger picture of putting us not just in the position where we get through the next few years, but, in fact, set ourselves on a path for the next decade and more to provide for a fiscally balanced and sustainable fiscal budget and economy.

Richard.

Q Mr. Hoyer, good to see you.

Mr. Hoyer. Good to see you.

Q On the jobs bill, couple of questions. One, do you believe that most House Democrats agree with your apparent embrace of the President's proposal? And two, what should happen now? Do you think the bill -- they should pursue the regular order, multiple committees reviewing, and how long might that take? What do you see happening now?

Mr. Hoyer. Well, I think what we see in the Republicans' response is a response to what all of us heard over the August break, and that

is, Americans are deeply, deeply concerned about the economy and the lack of jobs. They believe, correctly, that the deficit is a significant problem that we need to deal with, and the debt and deficit -- deficit being the annual, debt being the long term -- but I think that they heard as well that we have been saying we are not doing anything on jobs in the Congress. We have been saying that for 8 months. I think the American public didn't see us doing anything on jobs, and this is why Mr. Cantor, in fact, admitted that they were going to switch from their cut to job creation focus. I think that is appropriate and welcome.

I think the President has outlined, and I think most Democrats, Richard, which goes to your question -- the President has outlined a way forward. It does not mean that there is unanimous agreement on every facet of his proposal, but in total I think there is a feeling among Democrats that what the President's proposed will, in fact, be a positive step, will, in fact, assist the economy, and we think that is something that ought to be done and ought to be in done in the short term.

Q And what happens now?

Mr. Hoyer. Now, what happens now? Obviously that, in the House of Representatives, is under the control of the Republicans, and the Senate under the majority leader's control at least to the extent of fashioning that which he will offer. As we know, the minority largely controls the United States Senate. After you get the leader offering something, then it has to get 60 votes, which means that the minority

can stop action, as they have been doing this entire year. I think the American public's very frustrated by that. Frankly, I think individual Senators are frustrated by that. I know Mr. Reid is.

In the House I would hope that we would move this quickly. I would hope that that is moved in a unified way, even if it is segmented for committee consideration, but that it would be pulled together, because the President offered this as a package, as a whole cloth to try to knit together various different proposals, which, in sum, will have the positive effect of restoring confidence, giving the consumers more wherewithal to increase demand, and that manufacturers and businesses will, therefore, use the capital that they have.

I mean, we ought to make the point that there is a lot of capital on hand in corporate America, as a matter of fact, more recently than any time since the '50s, and that, therefore, if demand is increased, confidence goes up, the expectation would be that the corporate sector, the job-creating sector -- and the President, of course, focused on small entrepreneurs as well. We think that is very important because they create a lot of the new jobs. Corporate America has a lot of jobs. Unfortunately, corporate America, in particular Bank of America, is looking at perhaps laying off a whole lot of people, which would be unfortunate for those people, but also for our economy.

So the answer, Richard, is I hope the Republicans will accelerate consideration of this legislation, and if they disaggregate it, that they aggregate it back to be considered or to aggregate that which can be passed and that we can reach consensus on.

Q When do you expect -- just basically Leader Cantor told us yesterday he doesn't -- he and House Republicans can't accept some -- most of the stimulus spending. So he is more looking at reforms in the tax packages that the President's proposed. Is that, at the end of the day, what Congress can pass, is that acceptable to you and House Democrats?

Mr. Hoyer. No. The fact is that Republicans continue to focus on their tax proposals. I don't think they have changed since 1981 when I came to the Congress, and particularly when they -- of course, they didn't control everything in the 1980s, but when they did get control of everything, which was in 2001, presumably they were unfettered in their ability to effect their policies to grow the economy. It was a failure, demonstrably, on paper a failure, and led -- not in and of itself, because there were a lot of extrinsic happenings as there were in Clinton's economic boom, a lot of other stuff outside that led to success and that led to failure in the 2000, but the net result was the worst economy many of us have seen. You have heard me say that over and over again, but it bears repeating because we ought not to repeat the failures of the past.

Every Nation in the world that is our competitor is investing in infrastructure. The Republicans are suggesting disinvesting in infrastructure, cutting infrastructure investment. And I haven't talked to Mr. Cantor about it personally about what the specifics are that they can or cannot support, but, you know, we know that they support tax cuts, but if that is the only thing that they will support, that

is not going to get us to where we need to be, and that, I think, is demonstrably true based upon the 2000s.

Q Mr. Hoyer, both parties like to minimize the results of the special elections, but the New York-9 special election is far closer than Democrats thought it would be. What does that mean? Mr. Engel just outside said that it has been a nationalized election. Republicans have sought to nationalize it. So if that is the case, what does that say about President Obama's political fortunes or Democrats more generally?

Mr. Hoyer. Well, the special election, I don't know what is going to happen in the special election. You are right, it is closer than we would like to have it be and much closer than anybody thought it would be. This is a district that has an overwhelming Democratic registration, obviously, just as the 26th in New York has a very heavily Republican. Obviously that is not necessarily this year a predictor of what the outcome is going to be.

But we ought not get lost in the individual races, whether it is the 26th or the 9th or Nevada in the special elections. We have been pretty successful in the special elections over the years, as you know.

But the real big picture here is we have got to get people back to work. The President has offered a program. Whatever the results of New York Ninth, it is not going to be on his jobs program, in my view. I don't think it is going to have any -- there can be no conclusions you can draw about his jobs program. I think you can draw conclusions about unhappiness with the economy. I think you can draw

conclusions with reference to the President's perceived positions with reference to Israel, what Koch is stressing.

But I think that there is no doubt that people are concerned about the economy and jobs, and the President's come in with a program, and I think that the response I have heard from people is positive. They thought he was direct, focused, talking about something they think is important, talking about a program he thinks will make a difference, and I hope so.

Q So you don't think it reflects at all on the President?

Mr. Hoyer. Well, I think every election reflects on the person in charge, but I think that -- do I think it is an overall statement on the President alone? No. Do I think, you know, it would be interpreted as being a statement on Obama? That's probably correct.

Q Mr. Hoyer, do you worry that --

Mr. Hoyer. We are all pretty laid-back people in this town.

Q You heard a little bit asking Congress -- are you worried that that conversation will overcome what is in the bill, that it is -- that the conversation will then just become about pay-fors, and Democrats are going to be thrown off their message talking about jobs?

Mr. Hoyer. I think it is about jobs. I think it was important that he include pay-fors, and he said, you know, these are the pay-fors I would choose. He has used those before. You know, these are not new. So nobody ought to be shocked that he believes that we ought to cap 28,000 on deductions. He proposed that in his last budget and the budget before that. So that, you know, it is -- I think the issue is

jobs and job creation.

Let me reiterate that both the Bowles-Simpson and Dominici-Rivlin said, in the short term, focus on growing the economy and don't take steps that undermine the economy; in the long term, make sure that we are moving towards fiscal balance. That is why the President offered a program to grow jobs and then also offered a way to pay for that.

Now, does it make the committee's job more difficult? Yes and no. To the extent we grow the economy, revenues will increase, and the challenge before the supercommittee will lessen. Now, they will lessen within the next 60 days, which is their time frame. So don't misconstrue what I am saying. But if you grow the economy, there is no doubt that it will decrease the deficit, so that growing the economy is part of reducing the deficit. You have to invest to do that in the short term. I think both committees recognize that.

So what I think that -- the committee, I think, can look at those objections, and they could decide on its own. What I would say about the committee is the -- I would hope that every member of the committee understands the opportunity and responsibility that has been placed upon them, the opportunity to get us on a sound fiscal path and the responsibility to act in a way that accomplishes that objective.

By the way, I had mentioned John Kyl. One of the papers reported he had said, take this off the table, take that off the table. I talked to him just before the President's speech. We were both on the escort committee. And he indicated he had been misquoted and that -- that our conversation we had -- as I told you, I have talked to 11 out of

12. I still haven't talked to Senator Baucus. We have been back and forth -- that this is an historic opportunity, a critical challenge, and that hopefully every member of that committee -- and I have been pleased by the comments of a lot of them -- have said, we understand we need to deal with getting to an objective, and we need to consider everything being on the table. Mr. Becerra said that. I thought that was a very positive statement he made, and I would hope that all the members of the committee would feel that way.

Q On the jobs package, the President wants to pay for it with tax increases. Republicans say "no" to tax increases. So how do you move forward?

Mr. Hoyer. Well, you are not going to move forward if both sides are stuck in cement. I would tell you privately that many, many Republicans that I talk to understand you can't get there from here without revenues, and as I have said, you can't get there from here without looking at entitlements. If we just stick in concrete on both of those -- the leader and I have made it very clear that we want to make sure that present beneficiaries are not adversely affected, but that does not mean over the long term either revenues or entitlements can remain stagnant. Just can't get there.

So, you know, you are absolutely right. If one side says, we are not going to cooperate, we are not going to move, then that will have to be decided by the American people in 2012. I, frankly, think the American people need to elect people who want to come to Washington to solve problems, not to simply stand on a soapbox and make political

debating points.

Q But Senator McConnell has come out this morning in a floor speech and has basically condemned the Obama proposal, pretty well signaling he doesn't think much of it. So there you go. Boehner is still saying we can look at. That doesn't seem to be -- and my colleague can correct me -- that doesn't seem to be Senator McConnell's tone at all at this time.

Mr. Hoyer. Yes. And yet one should not be shocked that Senator McConnell said that he didn't like what President Obama suggested when his principal objective in life is to defeat President Obama next year. One should not be shocked that somebody is going to oppose President Obama. If your objective is to defeat President Obama, you don't say, Bill, what a great proposal he just made. It would seem inconsistent with the objective he has stated. We each have a --

Q The question is, does he speak for all Senate Republicans?

Mr. Hoyer. I would say that I have no idea what he speaks for.

Q Well, how serious is his threat?

Mr. Hoyer. What is serious is the challenge that confronts us. If politics is the motivating factor in the minds of the Members of the Senate and the House, America will not be well served. That is what the President said in his speech. That is what I believe. It is a time to rise above politics for the purposes of getting our country on the right track.

The overwhelming majority of Americans do not believe we are on the right track. We need to reinstill in them the confidence their

government can work, that it can work responsibly, and it can make tough decisions, not political decisions.

[Whereupon, at 12:03 p.m., the press conference concluded.]